

Later in the story, a sudden tragedy prompts the wife to reflect on her relationship with her husband and their argument over Brigid's care.

*After their argument, the husband goes to visit Brigid at her tiny cottage within walking distance of the house. When he doesn't return by dark, his wife gets worried and goes to look for him. She finds his body at the cottage, his head badly burned by the hearth fire where he had fallen, while Brigid sits uncomprehending nearby.*

It was dark at the pump, but she could hear people running the way she had pointed. Then when they had reached the cottage, there was no more running, but great talking and shouting. She sat down at the side of the pump, but there was a smell off her hands and desperately she bent forward and began to wash them under the pump, but when she saw there was hair stuck to her fingers she wanted to scream again, but there was a great pain gathering in her heart, not yet the pain of loss, but the pain of having failed; failed in some terrible way.

I failed him always, she thought, from the very start. I never loved him like he loved me; not even then, long ago, the time I took the flowers off my hat. It wasn't for Brigid, like he thought. I was only making myself out to be what he imagined I was. I didn't know enough about loving to change myself for him. I didn't even know enough about it to keep him loving me. He had to give it all to Brigid in the end.

He gave it all to Brigid; to a poor daft thing that didn't know enough to pull him back from the fire or call someone when he fell down in a stroke. If it was anyone else was with him, he might have had a chance.

Oh, how had it happened? How could love be wasted and go to loss like that? . . .

Suddenly she thought of the heavy feet of the neighbors tramping the boards of the cottage up in the fields behind her, and rising up, she ran back up the boreen.<sup>1</sup>

"Here's the poor woman now," someone said, as she thrust past the crowd around the door.

They began to make a way for her to where, on the settle bed, they had laid her husband. But instead she parted a way through the people and went toward the door of the room off the kitchen.

"It's Brigid I'm thinking about," she said. "Where is she?"

"Something will have to be done about her now all right," someone said.

"It will," she said, decisively, and her voice was as true as a bell.

She had reached the door of the room.

"That's why I came back," she said, looking around her defiantly. "She'll need proper minding now. To think she hadn't the strength to run for help or pull him back a bit from the fire." She opened a door.

Sitting on the side of the bed, all alone, she saw Brigid.

"Get your hat and coat, Brigid," she said. "You're coming with me."

1. boreen: a narrow country lane.

### Close Read

1. Reread the boxed text. What motivated the wife to be kind to Brigid initially?
2. How does the wife change during the story? Explain the lesson she has learned by the end.
3. Do you think the wife would have changed had her husband not died? Support your opinion with evidence.
4. "Brigid" is the title of this story, yet Brigid herself never speaks. Is she a flat or round character? Support your answer.